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DEPT FOR AF/W
DOE FOR GEORGE PERSON

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [NI](#) [ELECTIONS](#)

SUBJECT: REWRITING THE HISTORY OF NIGERIA'S 2007 ELECTIONS:
"ADVERTORIAL" CLAIMS TRIBUNAL RULING "VALIDATES" THE RESULTS

Classified By: Political Counselor Walter Pflaumer for reasons 1.4. (b
& d).

¶1. (C) A two-page advertising supplement in the March 24 International Herald Tribune trumpets the decision by the Presidential Election Tribunal to uphold President Yar'Adua's election, and includes lengthy excerpts from the official election report of the Independent National Electoral Commission's (INEC). The "advertorial" sings the praises of INEC Chairman Maurice Iwu and implies that any problems regarding the elections were the fault of former Vice President Atiku Abubakar's departure from the ruling Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP), and of the National Assembly's rejection of Constitutional amendments based on "suspicion" that former President Obasanjo was seeking a third term. Looking to the 2011 elections, the advertorial recommends "the full use of the electronic voting system," noting that "the electronic voter registry is now in place." (Comment: We, and most experienced observers here, consider this last assertion about an electronic registry utter nonsense. The reaction of one of our electoral partners here was: "Oh my God; there isn't even a MANUAL registry." End comment)

¶2. (SBU) The advertorial also lambasts international observers for exhibiting "an already fixed opinion and mindset," even going so far as to suggest the European Union observers simply recycled language from their 2003 post-election statement. In a featured interview, Iwu maintains the media reported "what they expected to happen rather than what happened." The article further notes that international observers and media were reportedly "a main source of the distorted image of the elections and the electoral system that was perceived abroad, as they were still (sic)taken to be credible and unbiased sources."

¶3. (SBU) Full text of the advertorial is available on the website of the lobbying firm Intercom UK Ltd at www.intercom-ltd.com/nigeria/pdf/nigeria.pdf.

¶4. (C) COMMENT. A full two-page spread near the center fold (pages 10-11) of the main edition of the International Herald Tribune must have cost the GON a sizable sum. This gratuitous attempt to rewrite the history of Nigeria's 2007 elections appears timed to coincide with the expected departure next week of several new Nigerian Ambassadors and High Commissioners, including those to the US, UK and South Africa, as well as the new GON Permanent Representative to the United Nations. Both we and other international and

local observers concluded that the elections were "seriously flawed," -- so flawed it is impossible to know whether or to what extent they reflected the intent of Nigerian voters. It is unclear whether this advertorial was paid for at the behest of the GON or other parties. That being said, the article is a charade; real electoral reform must happen or we will face an uphill battle to make any genuine progress before the 2011 elections. We will inquire behind the scenes just who was responsible for this advertorial. If President Yar'Adua was involved or even aware, it does not speak well for his commitment to reforming the broken electoral system.

END COMMENT.

SANDERS